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REMARKS

OF

HON. ISAAC C. PARKER,

OF MISSOURI,

IN REPLY TO MR. BLAIR, OF MISSOURI;

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

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UNIVERSAL AMNESTY.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri, in the course of his remarks in the House of Representatives, on the 21st December, upon the question of amnesty, among other things said:

"But, Mr. Speaker, I am told these men committed a great crime; that they are unworthy of confidence, and beneath the notice of the American people; and that such unmistakably is the doctrine held by the Republican party of this Union. What crime, Mr. Speaker, have they been guilty of? Is the crime committed by them in 1861 in rebelling against this Government any greater than that our forefathers committed in raising the standard of revolution against the mother country, England? Is treason by American citizens against the American Government a greater crime than treason by British citizens against the British Government? The people of the southern States to-day are guilty of no greater crime, legally considered, than that of which our forefathers were guilty when they rebelled against the Government of England."

In reply thereto

Mr. PARKER, of Missouri, said:

Mr. SPEAKER: I had not expected to say anything upon this occasion; but I am not satisfied that the sentiments which have fallen from my colleague [Mr. BLAIR] shall go to the House and the country as a reflection of the views of any class of people in the State I have the honor in part to represent. I do not believe, Mr. Speaker, that in the great State of Missouri—a State that was torn to tatters by the rebellion, a State which has required the efforts of an energetic and determined people to place it again on the road to peace and prosperity—I do not believe there is in that State to-day more than one man who would be willing to avow upon the floor of the American Congress sentiments such as have fallen from my colleague to-day, and I believe that one man is the distinguished gentleman who has just addressed you. You cannot go to either the Democratic or Republican party of that State to-day and find any man who is willing to stand before the country and the world and justify the enormity, the crime, the degradation and wickedness connected with the system of American slavery as it existed before the war. Yet we find the gentleman here to-day going back even to Holy Writ for the purpose of justifying the system of slavery which existed here.

The gentleman ought to know that we are living in a brighter and better day, when the rights of man are looked upon as sacred, when it is the highest aim and noblest purpose of the good and true to assist and elevate the downtrodden and oppressed, rather than to justify or apologize for the system which debased and degraded them. A new era has dawned upon our country—an era in which "peace on earth and good will to man" is the polar star of the Christian statesman, and of the great mass of men and women who look upon all mankind, no matter of what Christian faith or nationality or color, as men and brothers. We are indeed living under a new order of things. Men now seek to be governed by right and justice, rather than by oppression and wrong. It is a period when it may be said with some show of truth "that mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

The gentleman, while exploring the records of the despotism of past ages, appears to have forgotten that it was proclaimed by the Saviour of the world, when He taught the multitude and through them all mankind, "that all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets."

The gentleman is living in a past age. The times have outrun him. He is unable to keep pace with the progress made in favor of the rights of man during the last ten eventful, terrible, bloody years of our national history. In that time slavery has been abolished; its crimes, its wickedness, the degradation and misery entailed by it are now fully known and hated by men. And all good men say "Oh! what a monster was this which fastened itself upon our system of government; what a Promethean vulture was this which preyed upon the very vitals of our institutions and well

nigh wrought their overthrow!" We are trying in this age to forget the evils and wrongs of the past. If men would but recognize the fact that slavery is dead and buried in the same grave of infamy with treason it would be better for the nation, better for its citizens, better for the cause of humanity, and better for the rights of man everywhere. If men would but endeavor to go forward instead of backward, if they would but keep pace with the mighty strides toward liberty and security for all, which the nation has made in the last decade, then we could say that America is the propagandist of democracy and that we have instituted the only successful republic of ancient or modern times—a republic which has been rendered sacred by the loyal blood shed in its defense; a republic of which the foundations have been cemented by no unrighteously spilled blood; a republic founded on reason, on the unalterable principles of humanity, neither twisted nor forced from their natural channels to harmonize with vice, wrong, and oppression. Then we would know that American republicanism, with commerce and the arts of peace as its weapons, means the advancement of the human race.

But as long as gentlemen undertake to move the finger of destiny backward instead of forward on the dial-plate of time, as long as they endeavor to justify or gild over the wrongs of the past instead of denouncing them as crimes against God and humanity, just so long will the true hearted and patriotic fear for the safety of the great Republic.

Why, I thought that the party with which the gentleman has lately commenced to act were asking us on this side of the House that we should forget all the wrongs inflicted upon the Government and its citizens in the past. We have tried to forget them. We are forgetting them, excepting the lingering remains of crime, which are the legitimate outgrowth of that institution of slavery. There is no other man in this House, whether he sits on that side or this, who would think for a moment of justifying human slavery as it was in America, justifying an institution which was anomalous as connected with a Government which proclaimed itself to be a Government instituted for the protection of the rights of all men—a Government founded upon that immortal principle which declared all men were free and equal. Why, both political parties in this country, as I understand it, are willing to acknowledge, they are daily acknowledging, that slavery was a crime, that it was a great wickedness, that it did so warp and degenerate and draw aside from the path of duty the minds of the southern people as to place them in direct hostility to our Government. They all concede that, and the gentleman is the first member of this House who has been willing to put himself upon the record as justifying that institution of slavery; or, to put it as mildly as possible, of apologizing for it.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is not this sentiment which is most obnoxious to the people of my State, though it grated so harshly on the ears of the members of this House when it was uttered by the gentleman. He asks the question, was it any greater crime for Americans to rebel in this country against the American Government than for our forefathers to rebel against the Government of Great Britain? I want it distinctly understood, that although we had one third of our population in the State of Missouri in armed hostility to the Government of the United States during the rebellion, I do not believe to-day in that State there is any man who will put himself on the record as taking a position of this kind. I cannot explain my friend's position in any other way than by attributing it to the enthusiasm of a new convert. I do not understand there is any gentleman on the other side of the House who would maintain that rebellion against the Government of the United States was no crime. The gentleman does not seem to be willing to put himself in that position by declaring that it was no greater crime than that of our forefathers against the Government of Great Britain; but he asks the question, thereby evidently intending to convey the idea that one was no greater crime than the other.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let us see how that was. We all know that in 1861, when rebellion burst on this land, when the people of the South were dragooned into it—because I am willing to concede, and I have believed all the time, that the masses of the southern people were led into this unholy and wicked strife for the overthrow of the Government by their leaders—immediately before Sumter was fired upon on the 14th of April, 1861, every department of this Government was in the possession of the southern people or of the party which had been the champion of their cause. All the prominent offices of the Government were held by men from that section of the country. They had every department in their possession. They had enjoyed the patronage of the Government from the time of its formation to the time they rebelled to a greater extent than the people of any other section of the country. Then, did they have any right on that ground to undertake to tear down the Government and build up in its stead a great slave empire where slavery would be the rule and freedom the exception?

Well, what other rights of theirs were invaded? The gentleman said their slave property was in danger. If there was any agitation which grew up in this country and which sought to endanger their slave property, pray tell me who began it? This question was understood in the political history of the country to have been settled entirely by what was called the

Missouri compromise. Who sought to violate that compromise, and to drag slavery before the nation once more? Who opened up that controversy and sought to violate that compromise in order that other Territories might be brought into the Union as States, which, in the language of another, "should be compelled to submit to the hateful embraces of slavery?" It was the party which had its seat and center in the southern part of the United States. The slavery question was practically settled by that compromise line. It was taken from Congress, and it was taken, as an agitating cause of trouble, from before the country. Yet it was reopened; legislation was commenced upon it again and by this very party.

Well, it might be said that in consequence of a party that was unfriendly to slavery electing a President of the United States that institution was rendered insecure. I want to ask the question whether or not that President did not in every declaration that fell from his lips pledge himself to protect slavery under the laws of the country? I want to ask the question whether or not that President, after he was installed in office, did not in one instance return to slavery men who were seeking freedom? I want to ask the question whether or not the position was not taken by that President in his inaugural message that this institution was to be as safe as it could be made under the laws of this country? I want to ask the question whether or not the American Congress did not pledge itself to protect slavery in the States where it existed? Then, what reason was there upon that ground for this rebellion? There was no reason anywhere for it. There was no reason that can be given that was a true one, except that which has been given so many times before to the country—the desire upon the part of a few men in the southern States who sought to build up a slave empire; men who hated freedom and who loved bondage; men who desired a government where aristocracy and caste should rule; men who, when they found they could not control the American Government to such an extent as to subvert it from the design of its original founders, sought to build up a government that should have in it an element of aristocracy, which should recognize the rights of the few, and leave unrecognized and unprotected and uncared for the rights of the many. That was the reason of this rebellion.

The fact that the southern people, or most of them, were made to believe that slavery was endangered, was only one of the means that was resorted to by those men who sought to "fire the southern heart" and to precipitate the cotton States into rebellion. Then, what becomes of the inquiry as to the relative criminality of this rebellion against the Government of the United States and that of our forefathers against Great Britain?

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I would like to ask the gentleman a question.

Mr. PARKER, of Missouri. I yield to the gentleman for that purpose.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I remarked that the offense of those who rebelled against the Government of England was that they had violated the laws of the land, and that the people of the South had done nothing more, and that both were guilty of treason, and that those who rebelled against this Government, so far as crime was concerned, could not be any more guilty than our forefathers were. If the gentleman can make a distinction or a difference there I would like him to do it.

Mr. PARKER, of Missouri. I can see very little distinction between the position assumed by the gentleman in the first instance and that assumed by him now. There is a difference, however, between the cases he has mentioned. Everybody recognizes, the world over, that there is an inherent right existing in mankind to overturn established order as a *dernier ressort* for the protection of human life and human liberty and human property. But in this case we had a Government that guarantied, theoretically and practically, protection to all these elements of human happiness; in the other case we had a Government that sought to degrade and debase life and liberty on this continent. In one case we had a Government controlled by the very men who lifted the wicked and impious hand of treason against the flag of our country; in the other case we had a people whose interests were controlled three thousand miles across the briny deep. In one case we had a people secured and protected in every right that they were entitled to under any system of government; in the other case we had men who were entitled to rights that were not protected by the Government. The simple difference and the simple distinction between the two cases is that our forefathers had a just cause to throw off the yoke of English tyranny, and those who rebelled against the Government of the United States did it without a shade of a shadow of a cause. Our forefathers struck for God and liberty: those who rebelled against our Government struck for despotism and slavery.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. In your opinion.

Mr. PARKER, of Missouri. Well, does the gentleman think that they had a cause?

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I am not passing judgment upon that. My argument is drawn from the conscience of those who were engaged in the rebellion. I did not involve myself in it, for it is known that I have been anti-slavery for years, but I was treating it from the standpoint of those who were engaged in the rebellion, who had held the institution for a century or more, and I say that that people, so long as they believed that slavery was right, could have

no conscientious scruples, or believe they were guilty of crime.

Mr. PARKER, of Missouri. That does not answer my question. After I had assumed a position here, my colleague said, "That is so, in your opinion." Well, that is so, in my opinion, and I hope to Heaven that it will always remain so. Now, I want the gentleman to be equally fair with me, and to give the House his opinion as to whether he thought it right or wrong.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. Slavery right?

Mr. PARKER, of Missouri. The rebellion.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. The rebellion; no, sir. I never believed it was right.

Mr. PARKER, of Missouri. That answers my question.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. But then I am not the judge of their conduct. They are to be held responsible for their own conscientious views on that subject, and not mine. And so it was with our mother country, England. She regarded our forefathers in the same light that you to-day regard the rebels in the South. They looked on them as traitors, as rebelling against one of the best Governments on earth. They used the same arguments that you use to-day.

Mr. PARKER, of Missouri. The gentleman answers my question at last, and says he does not believe the rebellion was right. I am very sorry to see my colleague put himself in the position of becoming an apologist in this House for that which he believes was wrong. There is a distinctive difference between right and wrong, and whenever a gentleman is satisfied that a matter is wrong he ought never to justify it or to become its apologist.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. Will the gentleman say in what sense I am the apologist of the rebellion?

Mr. PARKER, of Missouri. I have been very indulgent to my colleague.

Mr. BLAIR, of Missouri. I hope the gentleman will not make statements unless he gives me the opportunity of asking questions by way of explanation, at least.

Mr. PARKER, of Missouri. I will answer the gentleman by quoting on him the remarkable speech that just fell from his lips, and if that was not an apology and not an effort upon his part to justify this crime against the Government then I fail to understand the meaning of the English language. Why, even our colleagues upon this floor, the honorable gentlemen who have been admitted here, who were disfranchised under the laws of the country, and who are now entitled to sit here with us, and who are our peers here, are not found justifying this rebellion by any means. They are not doing it. No man upon this floor does it, except as it has been done by the gentleman here to-day. And the time has come, I think, in this country, if we desire peace and harmony and prosperity throughout the whole extent of this broad domain, when gentlemen should not only cease to justify the rebellion, but should commence to denounce it as a crime, and not only as a crime of ordinary extent, but one that was extremely wicked, one that caused the destruction of hundreds of thousands of the bravest and best men in the land, one that destroyed millions of property, one that still leaves its scars upon the institutions of this country, one that came nigh tearing from beneath this noble governmental fabric of ours the very foundations upon which it rests. And I want to say here that as the gentleman has become suspicious of the Republican party, the party he has been acting with in the past, the party he claims that he fought on the side of during the war, I want to say here that so far as that party is concerned, although we may occasionally hear the charge hurled at it that it is illiberal and proscriptive and tyrannical and all that sort of thing, there is not a party whose acts have been recorded upon the pages of the world's history that has deeds of charity and forgiveness and kindness written upon its record in such burning letters of light as has the Republican party of this nation. It is a party of charity and a party of forgiveness. Tell me, Mr. Speaker, a government under the sun which, after men had rebelled without cause, without a decent pretext, without any justification in the world, and after they had caused ruin and destruction and devastation such as was witnessed upon every hand at the close of this war in 1865—tell me of a government that would have dealt so lightly with the leaders of that rebellion as the Government of the United States, under the control of the Republican party, has done.

Almost every demand that has been made by those men who were in the rebellion has been complied with by this party. They came up here after the war, asking that they should be recognized. The Republican party said there was one condition-precedent, which was that we must have guarantees that they would no more lift the hand of revolt against the Government. The Republican party said to them, "You must insure protection to life, liberty, and property to every citizen in your section of the country, from the highest to the lowest." When those things were guaranteed, those States were admitted to representation in this House and in the Senate. When that was done it was believed that time would heal the harshness that had been left by the rebellion.

But what do we witness to-day? An attempt is being made in some localities of the very region of country that was in revolt against the Government to do what? To protect life, liberty, and property? No, sir; but to crush out of existence men whose only crimes seem to be that they are black, and are loyal to the

Government. This question can no longer be one of controversy. The matter has come up in the courts of the country, where facts have been developed that ought to cause the cheek of every honest man to blush for shame that such infamous conduct should be practiced under a Government pledged to the protection of the life, liberty, and property of the citizen.

The fact that there are men banded together for the purpose of destroying the rights of others in the southern States, because they do not agree with them in political sentiments, is no longer a mooted question. The wonderful and astonishing thing is that an attempt should be made to justify such conduct. Whoever heard of an attempt to justify murder because the victim may be said to have committed some crime? Why should these nameless crimes in the southern States be excused in the manner in which it is done here?

We hear a great deal about the necessity of general amnesty. Sir, this House at it last session passed a bill, for which I together with a great majority of the Republicans in this House voted, and which went over to the other House, from whose provisions are excluded only about one thousand men in all the United States. A stranger in this land, unacquainted with the rights which all citizens enjoy under the laws of the United States and of the several States, would understand from the remarks of my colleague [Mr. BLAIR] that men were terribly oppressed here; that in some sections of the country they were deprived of their rights as citizens. There is not a State in this Union, except perhaps there may be one, where any man is disfranchised, where every man has not the right to vote, unless he is a criminal and disfranchised by the judgment of a court. They all have equal rights in that respect. The man who bared his bosom in the cause of his country, together with the man who raised his arm against that country, both alike can go to the polls and vote. Is there no charity, no kindness in that?

And let me tell the gentleman that that was not granted by this Government because the loyal people of these States did not believe that rebellion was a crime. No, sir; it was simply granted as an act of charity, and in the hope that those who received that charity would be able to appreciate that act of generosity and kindness, and would be willing in the future to stand side by side with every good citizen for the protection and security of the Government of the whole country. That is why that right was granted to them, notwithstanding the great crime they had committed.

Now, who are those who are not included in the provisions of the bill of amnesty passed by the House at its last session? They are the men who brought ruin upon the southern States and desolated them; the men who caused them to be laid waste, who caused the residence of the planter to be lighted up with the torch of the incendiary, who caused the lurid light of war to glimmer upon every mountain-top, on every hill-side, in every valley in the southern States. They are the men who, in 1861, stood up in the Senate Chamber, and, as they prepared to leave the Hall, said they would have a Government to suit their selfish purposes, and, holding up their white handkerchiefs, boasted that their efforts to do so would not cause blood enough to flow to stain them. Those are the men who to-day, through the mouth of the gentleman here, are asking that we should deal liberally with them.

Sir, the Republican party of this country has no feeling of unkindness for the people of the South. The Republican party knows no section, neither North nor South, neither East nor West. It is the only truly national party that has ever existed in the history of this Government. Its advocates, and those who believe in its principles, can be found among the everglades of Florida as well as amid the snow-capped regions of Alaska; they are everywhere. The Republican party is national in its character. It has no feeling of unkindness toward the people of the South who were drawn by their leaders into rebellion. Every step they have taken to bind up the bleeding wounds of this nation and to heal the differences of the past has been characterized by kindness, and forbearance, and forgiveness.

I know we hear it said that the Congress of the nation has been guilty of harsh legislation; but I ask, has Congress, in its efforts to heal divisions and cement the people more closely together, ever passed a law that was not intended for the protection of the innocent against the efforts of the guilty to deprive them of their rights? Then why should men, if they are guiltless, if they have not imbrued their hands in the innocent blood of those men who were lately emancipated, characterize our conduct as a party by those harsh and opprobrious terms which they are constantly hurling against us? I can say to gentlemen upon the other side that the Republican party of this country will go as far as themselves toward enfranchisement or anything else, if you can satisfy it that the country is perfectly secure and that by such a measure the harmony and prosperity of the nation are to be promoted. But it does not look well for gentlemen to stand up in the House of Representatives of the United States and plead for a man who but a few short months ago proclaimed to the southern people, who were becoming quiet and peaceable once more, that their cause—"the lost cause," the cause of treason, the cause of those who sought to tear down the Government—was not dead, but only sleeping.

I do not believe the time has quite come yet that a man of that kind should be permitted to stand side by side with and as the peer of

CHARLES SUMNER in the American Senate. I do not believe, for one, that the time has quite come for any such thing as that; but I will go as far as any one toward giving enfranchisement and all the rights men can enjoy under this Government to the masses of the people of the southern States, to the men who are willing to recognize the fact that we are living under a new order of things; that a new era has dawned on the country, an era where liberty is the rule and despotism and slavery the exceptions.

And, Mr. Speaker, let me say to my friends on the other side of the Chamber that it seems to me, when they are advocating the rights of the South, when they are advocating the claims of the southern people, there are many things which they are neglecting here—not intentionally, of course. There is a work of reconstruction which can go on [illegible]nd which can bring about peace and harmony to a greater extent than has yet been permitted, and that is, for them to seek to develop the resources of the fertile country they may have the honor to represent. There is some disposition in some localities of the country to keep out capital and enterprise, because they may happen to come from some other section. This is surely wrong. This work of reconstruction will be only fully consummated, will be only fully carried out, entire peace, security, and happiness will only reign, when commerce shall carry its good work into those States, and when capital and enterprise from all sections of the country shall be invited among them. It seems to me this is the most practical work to which gentlemen from that section of the country could devote themselves.

And let me say, Mr. Speaker, that the Republican party does not believe that the rebellion was not a crime. It has sought to brand it as a crime. It has sought to place its infamy where it can be read by him who runs. At the same time it is willing to go as far as the safety and security of the country and the prosperity and happiness of the people will warrant it, in granting amnesty to these leaders. It is now only the leaders who are excepted, not the masses of the people who were dragooned into this thing. We know that hundreds and thousands of them were not conscious of what they were doing. The Republican party has recognized that. All their misconduct has been obliterated, in a legal point of view at least. It is only the leaders, the men who persuaded them into it, and soon there will only be a few, comparatively speaking, of those who remain. I think we have gone as far for the peace of the country in that direction as we ought to go at this time.

No man asks these men, the Republican party has not asked them, to get down on their knees and ask forgiveness. The gentleman is mistaken if he thinks the party with which he has heretofore acted has ever asked at the hands of these men any such thing; but it is asked, it is demanded at their hands, that they shall assist in guarantying the rights of all men, no matter who they may be. Until they show a willingness and disposition to do that, until they show a willingness and disposition to recognize the rights of colored men in those States, as well as the rights of white men, I think the Congress of the United States ought to deny to these men equal rights in this Government. I believe that to be the sentiment of the people in my State. I do not believe the people of the great State of Missouri to-day would vote for any such measure as the gentleman has proposed. I do not believe that it is any reflection of their sentiments when gentlemen on this floor claim that the Republican party, being the dominant party of the nation, is cruel, unjust, illiberal, and proscriptive, when it fails to recognize the fact that Jefferson Davis, and Toombs, and Stephens, and all these men, are entitled to the rights of all other citizens. There ought to be some distinction somewhere.

Gentlemen say we admire these men who fought against the Government. We may admire their courage, but we hate their crime, and that is about the view we take of this matter; and, speaking as liberally as we can while there is patriotism existing in the country, while there is love of country in the breast of man, I hope there will be a majority of the people of the whole land who will hate any attempt to subvert the Government of our common country.

It is as well gentlemen should recognize the fact that there are other things to be taken into consideration besides emancipation from this cloud which hangs over Jefferson Davis. There are a few humble people in the southern States whose rights are as sacred to the Republican party as the rights of the most powerful in the land, and I think we ought to be able to guaranty protection for life, liberty, and property to those people before we grant amnesty to men who are still striving to fan the flames of hatred, and to cause them to burn with more intense heat against these people than ever before.

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